INFORMANT: Ken Bush
INTERVIEWER: Steven Bucklin
DATE: 17 May 1999

SB: [The interviewer Steven Bucklin ]
KB: [The informant Ken Bush]

[Beginning of side one, tape one]
[Interview begins.]

SB: Ken, for the record we need your full name.

KB: Kenneth Payne Bush.

SB: And your unit of assignment when you were with the 44th?

KB: When I left the 44th I was a security police group, I was assigned to the 813th Missile Security squadron.

SB: Okay. And your duty position?

KB: Security superintendent of missile support.

SB: Okay. Where are you from originally?

KB: Kentucky, Lexington.

SB: And...

KB: About 17 miles east of Lexington.

SB: Okay, when did you come to South Dakota.

KB: I first came to South Dakota in, um, fall of 19, it's a long time ago, I want to say 1975.

SB: So it has been awhile?

KB: It's been awhile.

SB: Do you like it here?

KB: I do. I do like it.

SB: Great. If you would for us describe your mission. Tell us what your duties were. What jobs you held in the missile business and whether or not you felt you were adequately prepared for them.

KB: When I first came to Ellsworth, and by saying that I guess you can figure out that I'd been here more than once.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: I first came here in the fall of 1975 as a, I was an E-5 at the time, I do believe. At that time I was assigned uh, to the 44th missile security squadron.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: And at that time there were, there was only one missile security squadron. And later on it, it evolved into two separate squadrons. I was assigned duties as a flight security controller. I also because there wasn't much rank around at that time, I also pulled a lot of duty as assistant flight chief at the time. And it gave me an opportunity by pulling assistant flight chief to drive over to one of the particular missile squadrons. At that time I was assigned to the 68th missile security squadron, we stayed in one area. The security police did. We went out, we were assigned in one area.

SB: So as security police, what did you do?

KB: I as a flight security controller, I monitored the dispatched security teams, to alarms that were received down in the capsule crew, who in turn relayed them to the wing security control at Ellsworth. And they informed, called me back and said "Okay. we need to send a security unit out to investigate the alarm at a particular site."

SB: And the alarm would usually be at a launch facility?

KB: At a launch facility, scattered all over western South Dakota.

SB: Okay. How seriously did you and the people you worked with take your jobs?

KB: Well, because we were doing it, I would like to think, and I personally, you know, we, we took it seriously. I think that the Air Force considered it more serious than we did, because, you know, you had to be screened before you actually pulled, pulled this type of duty. To see if you were any type of threat to, to the mission itself, you know, which of course was to you know, keep the missiles up and ready to be fired at any time.

SB: Okay, we are going to stop right now and do a check of the equipment.

[Break.]

SB: Okay, we're back and the equipment is working fine. Were there any standard operating procedures in force during your course of duty? If you ran into an intruder as an example, at an LF what was it that you were required to do?

KB: Well, depending on the nature of threat at the time, and I would like to say that during my whole time in the time I spent in the missile fields at Ellsworth we never came across any threat.

SB: And how long a time was that, Ken?

KB: From the time I was out there, from the fall of 1975 to the winter of 1976. And again from December 1979 until June of 1990.

SB: Well, that's encouraging to know. [Laughter.] Okay, so, but were there standard operating procedures if you found, as an example an intruder on site or....

KB: Sure, we had certain operating procedures. Again you know, it's hard to describe, you know, what you would do in any given situation, because each situation of course is different. Our first goal, of course, was to detect, detain and then report. And we would take our instructions from there.

SB: Okay. What responsibilities consumed most of your time?

KB: Responsibilities? Wow. The hardest part of this job, and I might be varying from your question.

SB: That's all right.

KB: Was the, our job was boring.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: And that's a good thing, you know for the business we're in, in security police business. If your job was boring, that's good. That means you're doing what you're supposed to be doing. And our job, of course, was to detect, you know, any intruders that weren't supposed to be there in the first place. We never had that happen, unless it was a jackrabbit or a coyote, or something coming across the launch facility itself. But again to

sit here and to say, well you know, what did you do, what did you have to do, it's hard to say.

SB: Sure, because you didn't have an intruder over all those years.

KB: Again, our basic, our basic goal was to, you know, first of all detect, and then we would detain them, and then report them.

SB: So during those years that you were out there, how real did you think the threat to the United States was from the Soviet Union? How important was your job to our national security?

KB: I don't, I can't actually say how, you know, tell you what I thought about the threat from the Soviet Union, but I thought that the fact that the way we took care of our missiles, the people involved and what we had to do to get them out there, to maintain them, the, you know, it made you feel good at times. Because I'm saying that here we are security policemen, okay, we're making sure that no one is threatening the defense of the United States. I know this sounds patriotic and I'm waving the flag here but...

SB: There is nothing wrong with that.

KB: We would go out there for three days at a time and you know, it would get monotonous and it would get boring, and some of the times we didn't want to be there. Because we're saying, there's really no way anyone can get to this missile. We actually felt that all the time as a security police, I did anyway, that there is no way can get to that missile. But we had to make, someone, somewhere, sometime, said, okay we gotta make a, put a security force or a security program in place where hey, no one can get to, and they couldn't. You know, there were certain procedures that you had to go to, to get the missile itself. I don't want to get in to too much detail, because those same programs and systems are being used.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: But we did feel like we were doing something important.

SB: Good.

KB: But again at the same time, hey, while we're out here no one can get to that missile, no one wants that missile, you know... [Laughter]

SB: Did you think the missiles would ever be used?

KB: I never, I never thought, personally, that they would ever be used. The fact that they were there were enough. That was enough deterrent for

anyone. And as many of them as we had I don't know why anyone would want to put themselves in a position to antagonize the United States, because the might that we have in our arsenal is pretty impressive.

SB: Did the Air Force make you aware of what these missiles could do when you went through training? Did you know that a Minuteman II could do X amount of damage?

KB: We, we, I never, I, I don't recall any time, you know having a briefing where, we, we got, got any details of what the capabilities of the missiles, missiles were. You know, sure we could read literature about the missile itself, you know the history of the missile. You know, certain things they can't tell you of course. But we all knew that you know, they could do some damage.

SB: Uh-hum. Did you, did you feel confident in American missiles as opposed to their Soviet counterparts?

KB: I don't know if they brainwashed us or not, but I think, I, we, I had more confidence in our missiles than I did, than I did in the Russian missiles coming over here. I think ours could reach them before theirs could reach us.

SB: Uh-hum. Okay. Uh, was your unit's morale, how would you evaluate your unit's morale?

KB: The unit itself, it depended, you know, on the particular time of the year. And what particular time of year, I don't know, because there was always, seemed like a manning shortage.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: And when you're, when you're short on manpower, that means that people that are there have to do more of the work. The schedules that we as security policemen had and I'm going to stick to this present time, or the most recent time that I was assigned to the missile field, where we had two separate missile squadrons. One was where they the security teams went out and stayed at the, you know, their particular area, assigned area to respond to the alarms. And the other missile squadron was a missile support squadron, which is where I was assigned. And we were the ones that escorted the missiles out there. We were the ones that provided the security for the maintenance teams that went out there. And we also baby-sat the launch facility if your launch system went down, which means, you know, we went out, we took, put a two man or a four man camper team out there and they stayed out there until the thing got fixed.

SB: Would that be for an RON? Is that what that was called?

KB: RON--Remain Over Night--and the RON could turn into two nights, three nights, or four nights, depending on how long it took maintenance to repair the missile. And during the times when manpower was high and maintenance was low, I mean, meaning that maintenance could go out and fix the site or the sites weren't breaking down for one reason or another, the morale of the security police in my section was high, because that means we didn't have to go out to the missile field as much.

SB: Um, hum. How was your relationship with the maintenance personnel?

KB: Well, it got to a point where we, as security policemen, we would uh, you know, they out there, they have their ego we have our egos. They depended on us. They couldn't go out there unless we went with them.

SB: Um hum.

KB: But we got to the point where we, we saw missiles breaking down or launch facilities with the launch systems not working, meaning that we would have to go out there and stay with the missiles. We didn't think too much, we didn't think too highly of them.

SB: Um hum.

KB: But when things were going good, hey, everything was hunky-dory.

SB: We were interviewing a maintenance man the other day who mentioned some good-natured, um, fun between the security police and the maintenance personnel. Are you aware of any incidents like that?

KB: Not personally because I never traveled, I never traveled myself with a maintenance team.

SB: You stayed in the control?

KB: Yeah, yeah, I, you know, I was either in the flight security control office or, you know, I was, you know, on base doing the paperwork to make sure that we had people to go out with the maintenance team. That type of thing. But I never really traveled out, traveled with a maintenance team to . . . And I am sure there was some, you know, horseplay, this and this, and fun things happening. 'Cause you had to break the monotony. Some of this stuff became routine. And I know that's a bad word to use--routine--because nothing's really routine, but some of it, some of it came, became so monotonous because you were doing it all the time. The same thing all the time. Up and down I-90. Up and down Highway 14, you know. Back

and forth. Every day. And it, it got to be, you know, it just got dull. Got to be dull.

SB: Okay. You mentioned earlier that you were screened to become a security policeman?

KB: Yea. It was, um …

SB: Beside normal security um clearances? Psychological screening?

KB: Yes. And, um, [laughter] it's a funny, um, um, the Air Force had a program in place early in my career called the PRP program which stood for the Personal Reliability Program, and later they changed it to the Human Reliability Program. And, I remember one of the screenings when I came back to Ellsworth my second time, having been to the missile field before, knowing what it was all about. And they sent me to the psychiatrist, you know, that everybody has to go through this. And he asked me, he said, "Do you want to go to the missile field?" I said "No!" Well, right away, they pulled me. They say, "Well, you can't work." They pulled my clearance and everything. Said, "Well, you can't, you can't work around missiles." So I said "Well, okay, that means I'll be working on base." But the working on base part didn't turn out to good because they put me on some detail with bad hours and you know it was really, I mean it was bad. It was worse than going to the missile field for three days or whatever days, you know you, were on duty. And after about a-month-and-a-half, I went to my section supervisor and I said: "What's the problem here?" They said: "Well, they pulled your, your um, PRP or HRP." And I said: "Why?" They said: "Well, you don't want to go to work in the missile fields." And I said: "Well, who does?" [laughter]. I said: "He asked me a question and I answered it."

SB: Truthfully.

KB: And I told my commander what happened and the next day I was, I was back in the missile field. So it was pretty, you know, that was only one of my stories.

SB: Okay. [laughter]. Did you ever experience any problems with personnel assigned as security police? Anybody that had a problem with their job?

KB: I don't recall anyone going off the deep end while out in the missile field, you know. Everyone kept a close eye on, on each other, especially if you were a supervisor. You know, you kept an eye on your people to see, you know, if they were having personal problems at home. Or problems on the job with someone. And, you know, you just relayed that information to the next level. And went from there.

SB: Okay.

KB: But I'm sure there were people who you know, it got to 'em after awhile. Because you were away from your, your family for three or four days at a time. Uh, and it took its toll.

SB: Now for you personally, how long were you on and then get time off? Were you . . .

KB: The schedule, you know, if maintenance was doing their thing right, and the manpower was up, was that we would work for three days, and have about five, six days off. And during that six days, of course, you have time off. You have time for training, time for appointments, that type of thing. But normally, what would happen is we were short of manpower and the maintenance level was up so some of the time that we were supposed to be spending on base we had to turn right around and spend back out on the missile field. So it was a never-ending circle that we kept going in. While if the schedule, if our schedule worked the way it should have, it would have been nice. No one would ever complain. But we went out and got to work and realized, okay, well, we'll be gone for three days and come back in for five days. You know, we'll spend three days or four days with the family, have a day of training, and then get ready to go back to work. It didn't work that way most of the time, because of the work load.

SB: Was there a high turnover then among personnel assigned? Did people not want to sign up for another tour of duty? Or?

KB: It was, I wouldn't say it was a high turnover because you just couldn't up and leave when you wanted to. But there were always a lot of people going to base personnel, putting in for assignments to go elsewhere.

SB: Elsewhere.

KB: Yes.

SB: There weren't people knocking down the door to come serve? [laughter].

KB: No way.

SB: Okay. Um, I am curious. You mentioned that during these several years that you were assigned that there was never a case where you found an intruder. Did you ever hear anything about lids being blown off the LFs?

KB: I never had uh, the whole time I was there I never heard of any lid being blown off the LF.

SB: Um hum.

KB: Never, ever. Never. I know during the you mentioned, it's about the second time you mentioned the word intruder, during the Easter holidays or something like that we would have some protester would come and go to a particular LF and they would lay their Easter lilies and stuff like that.

[telephone interruption].

SB: Excuse me. Sorry for the interruption. What were your feelings about the removal and deactivation of the four hundred fifty Minutemen?

KB: You know, when I first heard that they were going to, I had no problem with them deactivating the missiles, taking them off alert. I had no problem with that. But when I found out that they were later going to blow up the holes that the missiles were in, then I kind of felt "Then what, why did I do that for all these years?" I really felt--that hit home with me.

SB: Did you think that there might be a need for them in the future again? Or?

KB: Well, I didn't think that there might be a need for 'em, but I thought, "Well, hey, we have 'em, you know, why don't we keep 'em in case we need them?"

SB: Um hum.

KB: You know. Maybe they could have dismantled the missiles, but keep the holes that they were put in, you know. I really thought that. But I had no problem with the missiles going off alert.

SB: Do you think that was then militarily justified?

KB: I've had time to reflect on that and, um, militarily yes, because, you know, we've got other missiles elsewhere that can do the same job. So how many missiles do you need? You know, you've heard that before. And also, the Minuteman IIs were old. And you know, you got think about the up-keep. And you know our guys got tired of going out there sitting, sitting on those missiles all the time, babysitting you know, and . . .

SB: And the Air Force got tired of footing the bill from what I understand, too. It was expensive.

KB: It was expensive to maintain.

SB: Um, hum.

KB: Expensive to maintain.

SB: And ours were all Minutemen II in South Dakota?

KB: There were Minuteman IIs in South Dakota. I'm pretty sure of that.

SB: Yeah.

KB: I might not be certain, but I'm pretty...

SB: I think you are correct. During the course of your duty did anyone die?

KB: I'm sad to say that, you know, we had a helicopter crash, and I'm trying to remember the year. But we had uh two, we had an airborne fire chief assigned to the missile support squadron and it was my flight. I'm the one who signed the duty rosters to send those guys up.

SB: Really?

KB: And we had four security policemen killed. And uh, the, there was a funny thing that sticks out in my mind on that crash, is the last name of all those security policemen, their last names begin with the letter 'H.' And three days before that my assistant flight chief, who died in that crash, he wanted me to go up with them, just to see how it was, because I'd never been in a helicopter before. And I didn't go. I didn't go. So...

SB: Wow.

KB: And that, yes, there were people killed. We had, there were only three security policemen killed because the girl survived.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: So, yes.

SB: How do you deal with that?

KB: I uh, you know, I think I've, I don't know, I think I'm, I'm still denying it. Because it happened during the summer, during the later part of May, and uh, I should say spring, and when they had the memorial, you know, I wasn't even here, I left. Because I had another commitment and I think that was my way of saying that it didn't happen.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: Or it, I didn't want it to, or I didn't want to believe it happened, and I think about it all the time. You know, its, you know, Hugley, Holmes, Highcamp, and uh, [long pause] and Husky. Those...

SB: All 'H's.

KB: All 'H's and the girl survived. Apparently she survived. So, yeah, there were people killed. And there were people killed before that, where I wasn't aware of it. I'm not, I don't have any knowledge of any details.

SB: In the long run, would you say though that loss of life was minimal?

KB: Oh yes.

SB: Over the thirty years of the, life of the ...

KB: Minimal.

SB: Okay. Um, get to a little lighter side ...

KB: Okay.

SB: You were located in, in what many people call the South Dakota desert while you were out here.

KB: That's putting it nicely. [Laughter.]

SB: I'd like you to describe the terrain.

KB: Once, you know, once you got into the middle of western South Dakota, you know, depending on where you came from it, it's beautiful this side of South Dakota. This side of the state is very beautiful. We got missiles out in the middle, in the Bad Lands, you know, up in the Hills. Not directly in the middle of the Hills but you got to go right by them every day. Along the Cheyenne River down here, you know, it's beautiful over in that area. And uh...

SB: Much different from Lexington where you're from?

KB: Quite different. Cause Lexington is a lot more prettier though. [Laughter.] The blue grass country is a lot more pretty. But at night, you know, guys coming in that were from the big city like New York or D.C. or L.A., these guys out in the middle of western South Dakota at night couldn't believe the stars. How dark it was, the number of stars, you know beautiful moon lit nights. The scenery is great on this side of the state. You know it's all

right unless you have to go sit on a missile site for awhile. [Laughter.] It's great. It's beautiful.

SB: Did the terrain cause any problems for security police?

KB: Yes. For some reason the Air Force was a stickler for good driving habits, but we never had good roads to drive on. [Laughter.] It was gravel roads, most of the roads were gravel. And you were transporting, you know, multi million [dollar], you know, weapons system along these roads. You have young people, young air men, you know, we're talking 19, 20 years old, who've, a lot of them don't have a lot of driving experience in the first place. And then you put them in a vehicle to go out on a gravel road that is somewhat maintained. When it rains, you know, you gotta start all over again and get the ruts out of the road. And the thing was, don't have an accident.

SB: And were there accidents?

KB: There were accidents. And I can never remember anyone getting seriously hurt.

SB: What kind of vehicles did they take out, if they went out to a launch facility? Would it be like a humvee, a jeep, a deuce and a quarter, what? I'm not sure what the Air Force uses.

KB: We have humvees now. At the time I was in, the humvees hadn't come along yet. We had some old big, big vehicle. I can't recall the name of it right now, that was built by the Chrysler corporation. The same people who I think build the humvees. And made of a big box shaped type piece of steel. Uncomfortable inside and that's what we used to, you know, escort weapons out to the missile field. Camper teams used what we called "six-packs", you know, you get, you know, you put three people in the front, and three people in the back of a pick-up. And they were, you know, they were regular pick-up trucks and stuff.

SB: Okay. So what were South Dakota winters like for you?

KB: Cold and nasty. [Laughter.] You know, there were times when we had people, I think the longest time we had people out at the missile field without getting them in for relief and stuff was about, I am going to say, six days. You know, they would normally come in after three-day rotations. But after, you know, six days is a long time be out there because, after that the...

SB: This during remain on ...

KB: Remain over night, you know, even if going out there, when you're supposed to come back the same day, you know, the weather breaks or doesn't break or turns for the worse, you know, guys get out there, well gee whiz, when am I going to get back? You know, you start playing games with your head.

SB: What kind of equipment would they have with them during the winter?

KB: We would, everyone, everyone would have a winter survival kit, you know, you were required to take a certain equipment with you, just in case something like that would happen. In fact when you went to the missile field, you were told, be expected to stay. Cause you might not get back that night, simply because of a, you know, again the maintenance load or even the weather, of course, of which we're talking about now. Uh, well you know, if you got to the LF, to the LCF, to the launch control facility, which is where everyone stayed. You know, that was a safe place to be.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: It was nice and cozy. But you always were told to be prepared to remain over night, RON.

SB: At an LF, right?

KB: No.

SB: At an LCF?

KB: LCF.

SB: Okay. How about, well, summers?

KB: Summers were great. You know, I remember times when, you know, it was, you have your cot, no air conditioning, no central air, that was the biggest thing. We had window, we had window air conditioning though. That, of course, helped. I don't know, you know, you fight off snakes and rabbits and stuff.

SB: Now that's my next question. [Laughter.] And the interesting encounters with animals?

KB: First of all, I don't like snakes, and uh...

SB: Did you ever run into rattlesnakes?

KB: We, I ran, I ran into one but I was in a vehicle and I was with the flight chief, I was his assistant at the time, and he spotted this snake crawl right across the road, it was a rattlesnake. And he said 'I'm going to stop and take care of it.' I said 'why?' He said, 'because they're mean.' He said, 'if it was a bull snake I'd leave it alone.' And he stopped, and he took care of it. And I stayed in the truck and I'm, I'm terrified of snakes and I must have, I don't know for the next twenty miles that we drove I just stayed stiff as a board.

SB: I'm not too fond of snakes either, especially rattlesnakes. How did he take care of it? Did he shoot it or... [Laughter.]

KB: No, no, oh no. We never used our weapon, no. He took a shovel, I think, we had shovel in the back of the vehicles, because that's part of the equipment we have to take out. And took care of it like that.

SB: Run into antelope, deer, uh ...

KB: I never, never recall, and there may have been but I don't recall anyone ever running into any animals that caused damage to a vehicle. I'm sure there may have been but...

SB: Did animals ever set off alarms?

KB: We think they did. That's the thing, we <u>think</u> they did, because we never got to, when an alarm went off, when the security team got there they never saw animal or deer, you know, struggling around the LF. They may see, they may have seen rabbit tracks in the snow, or something like that to cause, to cause to cause the OZ [Outer Zone] alarm to go off.

SB: And how sensitive were those OZ alarms?

KB: Well, I couldn't sit here and tell you how sensitive they were but if you, if you crossed it, if you got between those beams the alarm went off. The alarm went off.

SB: Okay. How were your relations with the people of South Dakota?

KB: Well, let me put it to you this way. Most of the people in South Dakota are great. There's this one, we had this one guy in the Wasta, toward the Wasta area and uh, I don't know if I should give you his name. But I won't. But he was a rancher, of course, and he had a hard time with the Air Force. He didn't like the Air Force, his, his, we had weapons on his land. And we had to travel through his land, of course, to get to a lot of our weapons systems. And he was always complaining. You've got a truck blocking my road. You've got a truck blocking my gate. You've got a

truck, two trucks down here where they shouldn't be. He was always calling the base complaining, and he, I think he just wanted to complain. But other than that most of the people in South Dakota, you know, they treated us nicely. You know, never any, I don't recall any bad feelings. I never recall anyone coming back and saying okay we have a problem with so and so up in Belle Fourche, and he did this, he said this. I never recall it.

SB: So generally would it be fair to say that the people of this area especially, supported Ellsworth personnel and their mission?

KB: I think that's a pretty safe assumption.

SB: Okay. Um, you mentioned earlier that there was an Easter protest. That was sort of an annual event.

KB: Yes, there was. I can't recall the name of the group but they would come to an LF near … in fact it was Delta, it was either Delta Five or Echo Five. That's where they would protest.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: They would lay their Easter lilies down.

SB: But always a peaceful protest?

KB: It was a peaceful protest.

SB: Media cover it or?

KB: Yeah a little bit, the media got tired of it, because there wasn't enough going on, you know, so they kind of backed away from it. We always knew they were coming.

SB: How was the media, in terms of its coverage of the mission?

KB: You know, certain times of the years when the wing would hold some type of competition or the major command would hold some type of competition, and the Ellsworth team left to go to compete, you know, excuse me, they would get decent coverage, you know. Pretty good publicity, for the local area to cover, you know, you've got some good people at Ellsworth doing this for you.

SB: How were race relations? First of all, in the Air Force? Let's...

KB: The Air Force did a lot to try to, you know, alleviate, or eliminate any type of, you know, racial problems that may occur. You know, at one time they had an office set up that dealt specifically with those type of things. You know they got rid of it, because they decided they didn't need it. You know, everyone, regardless of what race or ethnic group, we all have our own prejudices, likes and dislikes, but I, I think, you know, and they can come out in certain ways. But you know, most of them are so subtle that you don't realize it until, maybe it's too late or it really doesn't amount to anything. And I would say that the race relations within the Air Force were pretty good at the time I was there.

SB: So then let's go to how race relations were for you, as a black man, in South Dakota?

KB: I can honestly say that I never felt like I wasn't wanted anywhere. I can honestly say I was never mistreated anywhere I went. I remember one time I went to uh, I, it was in the early 80s, maybe mid-80s, I went to a place, and I won't give the name, in Rapid City and I wasn't treated quite right. But the place, the type of place it was, you know, it really didn't mean that much. But it's the fact that they did it, you know, they refused to serve us.

SB: Really?

KB: Yes. And uh, we took it, you know, we did what we were supposed to do. You know, we took it to the....

SB: Were you together with another black man?

KB: I was with another black, black person. And we took it to the Rapid City city council. And they, at the time, it was like "Okay, we'll talk to them and that will be the end of it." That's how we perceived it, was what they wanted us to do. We'll talk to them and that's gonna be the end of it. And we talked about it, the other guy and myself, about how far we wanted to go with this. And we, we backed off from it. We, we let it down. We, we forgot about it. But that was, that was the only one time that I was ever, you know, refused service.

SB: Did you have any expectations, Ken, when you came, I mean, were there ideas of how race relations might be in South Dakota? Had you heard things about the state?

KB: You know, I was young when I first came to South Dakota, a lot younger than I am now. And , you know, I wasn't up on things, the way I am now. You know, I was, I was a good soldier, you know, I'm going to go where

the Air Force sends me. And do my job, when I get off I'll be Ken Bush again. So...

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: I uh...

SB: How about relations with Native Americans? Any contact with the Native American community?

KB: Well I, as a, I honestly feel, that, um, for some reason most Native Americans, I shouldn't say most, but a lot them don't like black people. I, I feel that all the time.

SB: Really?

KB: I catch that. I don't know why. I have no reason, I don't have a clue as to why they don't like us. I'm married to one by the way. So....

SB: To a Native American?

KB: Yes.

SB: Yes.

KB: Uh, but Native Americans don't like black people, a lot of them, they don't like black people. There's a lot of them who don't like black people. Why, I don't know.

SB: So there were tensions between you and the Native Americans, or between black people and the Native Americans?

KB: No, no, I, I can't say there were tensions, that, you know, where you could go out and say so and so did this, so and so did that. You know, it was always a personal thing. You know....

SB: A sort of subtle feeling?

KB: Exactly. You could feel it.

SB: Now some of the missiles were located on Native American land.

KB: Well, I think, from what, from what I understand that uh, most of the ranches in this part of the country, are located on Native American lands and they like, lease them out or something.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: And those are where the missiles are. So yeah, you're probably right.

SB: But no Native American protest that you can recall.

KB: None, none that I recall.

SB: Okay. You want to take a break?

KB: Sure, I need some water.

[Break in interview.]

SB: All right we're back. The first female Minuteman crew member was a Captain Katherine McGuire. And you would have been in just after females began to serve regularly, I think, in the Air Force. It would have been about the late 60s, early 70s. How did you feel about mixing genders? Having the women in duty with you?

KB: We had a, in the mid '80s, we had our first female security policeman in this section, in the missile support section side.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: And it was not good.

SB: Really?

KB: Yes. Not to say that the women, of course, couldn't do it. 'Cause we had one go down in the helicopter crash. But, you know, women have personal needs that they to take care of, and you send women out there, you know, from my aspect of it, you know, for camp alert teams for three days. They're sitting in the middle of that camper for, and need to do the things. It just wasn't conducive to what we needed to be doing. You know, you couldn't concentrate on what you were supposed to be doing because of that. I think it was a bad move because they didn't, we didn't think it out far enough.

SB: Has that changed at all to your knowledge?

KB: I don't know. I don't know. It's been ten years since I've been out.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: And uh, at the time...

[Telephone interruption.]

SB: All right. Back to the question about women in the service. So what's your opinion in general about women in the Air Force?

KB: Women in the Air force, oh I have, I have no problem with that. I really don't. But you know there are a lot of logistics that need to be worked out. You know, before we can, you know...

SB: Would it be safe to say that there are certain missions or duties that didn't lend themselves to women in the Air Force? Is that...

KB: No, I personally, I think women can handle any job in the Air Force that a man can handle. I really think that, but there are certain places maybe women shouldn't be.

SB: Okay. Do you have an opinion about sexual preference in the Armed Forces? Should gays be allowed to service in the military?

KB: You know, I, I have no problem with gays in the military. Uh, you know, I think an individual, you know, I, see I'm a believer that you don't chose to be that way, you know, so that means that's the way you were, you were born. So why should you be punished for the way you were born.

SB: Okay. Were you aware of any gays that you served with?

KB: No...

SB: I know, it's don't ask, don't tell.

KB: I, I, you know, I never, it was never brought up. I can't recall anyone ever discussing that maybe so and so is, no.

SB: Okay. Basic weapons for a security police? What did you carry for a side arm?

KB: Well, we carried, the security police in the missile field, we carried M-16s.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: We had, depending on what you were assigned, you also had an M-60 machine gun.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: So...

SB: Crew served weapon? M-60s a crew served weapon or not?

KB: I apparently don't understand your question.

SB: Ah, it took more than one person to operate it.

KB: Oh, no! Crew served, oh, that's an Army term!

SB: Okay.

KB: Oh man. No. One person can operate an M-60.

SB: All right. Okay. Did you experience any shortages of equipment, or maintenance problems from the security police perspective? Not from maintenance problems of the LF.

KB: We always had, if, we didn't experience the shortage of equipment, we experienced a lack of maintenance on the equipment that we had. You know, equipment that was in place but it wasn't doing what it was supposed to be doing because for one reason or another. Maybe it was worn out, needed to be replaced or that type of thing. But, if, you know, missiles for some reason, I, and I say this because I stuck with it for ten years, you know, twelve years I was here, this last time. In the security police career field at Ellsworth, we had an aircraft security squadron and a missile security squadron. Well, it seemed like the people in aircraft, you know, they looked down on people in missiles, in missile security. And at the same time the people in missile security were always wanting to go over to aircraft security. And that's just the way, I thought at the time...

SB: So there was a feeling maybe that you were looked at as second class citizens?

KB: Exactly, exactly and I think the Air Force treated us that way too, because, you know, the aircraft, airplanes are the prima donna of the Air Force. And you know, missiles, hey, you know, okay missile folks, big deal.

SB: Not as glamorous?

KB: Not as glamorous. I also got that feeling because the way we tested to get promoted. We took a, what we call a specialty knowledge test, or an SKT. And there were about a hundred questions on this test. And you can tell the people who wrote the test for the security police spent a lot of their time in aircraft security. Because out of those hundred questions, I

could bet you, there were never more than fifteen question on there that pertained to your, to what I was doing.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: Never. So yeah, missiles, we felt like second class citizens. Yeah.

SB: What, I guess we have already answered that question. I was going to ask next about appropriate clothing for the climate. How was food?

KB: Oh, let me tell you about the food. Because we had, you know, at the launch control facility, you know, we had, you know, there were always six security policemen out there: the two missileers downstairs, there was a facility manager, and a cook. And the cook was one of the, you know, we cherished the cook. Especially if you got a good one. Because they would take, good one, that means they'd take care of you. They knew how to fix a foil pack, is what our food came in, you know, they were frozen food packets made up at Cheyenne Air Force Base in Wyoming. That's where they came from.

SB: Hmm.

KB: And we would, you know, have a kitchen there at the LCF we would go and order our meals just like we were ordering them on base. But you know, after a certain amount of time you get to develop a certain rapport, you know, with the cooks. And if you got a good cook, he would sometimes take left over, these foil packs and make soups, stews, that type of thing. Or sometimes we would go and pool our money together, and we would go into town and buy steaks and we would grill steaks. And the cook, if you had a good cook, we had one cook, who had been a chef. And he was a chef for some general, he was an aide, and he ended up in the missile field. We didn't ask him how or why. [Laughter.] But he was, he was good. I mean, he could take, if you ordered a salad for dinner, he would go out of his way, and take bread, like toast it and make the croutons for it, to put on the salad.

SB: Almost enough to make you go into the Air Force.

KB: Yeah. And where another cook would say if you ordered a salad, get you a hand full of lettuce, a slice of tomato, put a slice of tomato one it and say here. You know, some of them went out of their way. Uh, breakfast was a good time, because you got like real eggs and stuff like that.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: But the meals that we had, we had four meals served every day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner and a midnight meal.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: It was one of the things we looked forward to in the missile fields, was, was the food, because some of it was pretty good.

SB: When you mentioned earlier that boredom was part of the job, so I mean, the meal must have been one of the ...

KB: It helped break the monotony.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: The meal did. The food, you know, I've had worse food than the foil packs. That's why we called them foil packs, because they came in aluminum foil, frozen, and the cook threw them in the oven. You could order almost anything you wanted.

SB: Hmm. How about recreation facilities?

KB: There was always, you know, the asphalt out there, all the concrete. Most every place had a basketball goal, there was ping pong, pool tables, weight rooms. So there, there was enough to keep you occupied.

SB: TV?

KB: A TV, well, the only thing about that TV was the facility manager, it seemed like he controlled it. [Laughter.] You know, it was like, it was his building and stuff, you know, and he seemed, it seems like he had the last word on everything. I know later on . . . .

[End of side one, tape one.]

[Beginning of side two, tape one.]

SB: Okay we were, saying or talking about recreation facilities at the LCF. You were talking about the television and the FM.

KB: Yeah, the FM, seemed like he, you know, that was his little power surge thing right there, you know, "I'm the facility manager, I'll decide what we watch." And we all got to learn to like soap operas, you know, we all got hooked. I remember the time I was out there we got hooked on *General Hospital*. When Luke and Laura were running around the country. I remember when the Atari game first came out. I remember that.

SB: You had one?

KB: We had one. And eventually they ended up with satellite TV. I was never in for that satellite TV thing.

SB: How about VCRs?

KB: We had VCRs, yes, but we didn't have, the quality of the movies wasn't that great, at the time, you know? Seems like we never had any good movies to watch.

SB: Library?

KB: Uh, not a library per se, but, you know, there were magazines out there, you know. They were up-to-date magazines.

SB: So, generally, beside the boredom that you described before, I mean, was it all right?

KB: It was, it was okay. I can't say it was all right. Because you mean, you're out there for three days, you know, you're doing the same thing over and over for three days. And twelve hours at a time.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: And it was okay. It wasn't great. I've been in a lot worse situations.

SB: Okay. What was a typical alert like for you?

KB: Well, you know you started out with a bus ride to the missile field. Usually two, two squadrons went out together. And I say two squadrons, I mean, two sets of security police went out together to a particular squadron.

SB: And that would be how many people?

KB: We'd probably have about six, we'd have six security policemen on the bus, we'd have two cooks, and sometimes a facility manager. Most of the time, the facility managers rode out with the missile crews. For what ever reason, I don't know, but most of the time they did. And we went east a lot of times, which would mean we were going through Wall, that area.

SB: Uh-hmm.

KB: And one of the things, of course, was we had to stop at Wall and stock up on this stuff that we don't really need. [Laughter.] To make up for the foil packs, that weren't really all that bad. And you know, once we got there,

the change over part, you know you had to inspect, you know, the building and see, you know, what sites were down, you know, where the lines were pending, you know, excuse me, that type of thing. And then you settled in for three days.

SB: Did the alerts change at all in terms of the SOP? Or was it pretty much the same?

KB: It was the same. It was . . . you could, I could go out there right now and go through the same procedure.

SB: Um hmm.

KB: And not miss a thing.

SB: Did you or your unit receive any awards or citations?

KB: Not that I recall [laughter]. If we did, I didn't get any on my record, so. I'm sure we did, I need to check that, I meant to check that before I got here.

SB: That's all right. I'm kind of curious, too, you know there are a lot of official lines about survivability of the sites in the event of a first strike. The official line was that an LCF, or at least the capsule crew rather, could have survived an air burst and that they could have completed their mission afterwards. Do you have an opinion whether or not that's accurate?

KB: I would not want to be there when they put it to the test! [laughter] And that's all I'll say about that.

SB: Did you ever talk to the capsule crew?

KB: Yes. You know, capsule crews, they were pretty, they were good people, of course. You know. And you could talk to them. And they would talk to you. Or you'd want to go down and visit with them, you know, and if they weren't doing anything they'd come down and take a tour, you know?

SB: How about the no lone zone? Could you go into that? You always had …

KB: Not by yourself!

SB: Yeah. Anything like that ever happen while you were?

KB: No.

SB: No.

KB: No. You know, I keep protecting, you know, the image of the Air Force here, and I might be overprotecting, but that was the case, you know. We were good at what we did, you know, regardless of what some people might think of how mundane it may have been, but we were good at doing it.

SB: Yeah. Well I think that the fact that you accomplished your mission speaks volumes.

KB: Exactly! You know, we don't have those missiles on alert anymore, so we did something right.

SB: Um hmm. Ah, another question that I wonder if you ever heard the capsule crew members talk about were these escape tubes. Did they really think that those would work? Or do you know if they worked?

KB: I don't know. I don't know anything about that.

SB: Um hmm.

KB: I don't know.

SB: Okay. After an attack, what were you supposed to do? Given (1): that you survived.

KB: Well. And I can't say that we were given any specific instructions on what to do after an attack because, first of all, I don't think, you know, again, the situation itself is going to dictate what you do, but you still have a mission to do, to accomplish. And you have to, that's the first and foremost right there. Continue doing what you're supposed to be doing. So that means to put on your gas mask and do it, that's what you do.

SB: Okay. Were you prepared to deal with the refusal of a capsule crew to obey orders?

KB: That didn't come under my domain.

SB: At all?

KB: At all.

SB: It wouldn't be a security police issue?

KB: No. Not at all. Nope.

SB: What were your orders for the period after a first strike? Same thing?

KB: That doesn't come, that's not in my domain.

SB: Okay. Can you describe your most interesting dispatch?

KB: I can't say that any of them were interesting. It seems like I know if when I was working in Echo for awhile there, it seemed like every morning at five o'clock an alarm would go off at the same time at a particular LCF. And we never figured what it was. We never figured out what it was. For years, I'd be sitting out there, and I called up and I made contact with Ellsworth and I say, you know, maybe it's the rotational pull of the moon on the earth. Something like that. The gravitational effect or something. Every morning at the same time, this alarm went off.

SB: And it was impossible to diagnose?

KB: We send the alarm response team out there, it was unknown. 'Unk' is what we called it, 'unk.'

SB: Unknown.

KB: Unknown, u-n-k. [Laughter.]

SB: Any real vivid memory stand out? Obviously the crash of the helicopter crew. Anything else that stands out from your time in the missile field or the LCF?

KB: I noticed, I knew that, we uh, the facility managers, and this is kinda nit picky, but it kind of made me feel good. Toward the later part of my career, we had a commander come in, a group commander who was in charge of all security police at Ellsworth. And the facility managers, like I said before, they controlled everything out there. They controlled the TV, whatever, you know, details. We were assigned details out there, when we got off our duty, if we weren't out there responding to an alarm or in an office getting maintenance teams on site, and we were off, we were assigned duties. We had to clean up that place before we left. In summer time, we'd paint. We had, and we also had a concession stand out there. I say concession stand, but the facility manager would sell snacks, you know, that type of thing. He'd make money, he did, he'd make money.

SB: That was legitimate?

KB: Oh yeah, it was legitimate, oh yeah, yeah. It was no big deal. But the money, you know, that is how we decided to buy maybe an antenna for the TV, or the buy the VCR.

SB: Oh, it would be money that would be used for the...

KB: Yeah.

SB: I see, okay.

KB: But he decided what that money would be used for. Like buy pool tables, stuff like that. Foos ball tables. So we had a commander come in, he said "Well, hold it. We're the ones spending all the money, there are six security police out there on that site, only one facility manager, why does he get to decide how that money is spent?" And that made me feel real good, because some body was finally taking notice.

SB: Did you like that group commander?

KB: Yeah, I did. He's still in Rapid City too.

SB: Is he?

KB: Yeah, and that made me feel good because somebody was finally taking notice of the security police. Like I said, the air craft, like I said before, had all the glory. We were just protecting missiles, you know. But, I mean, I always said I wanted to tell someone that story. So...

SB: Glad you did. Did you have any humorous experiences? Anything that stands out in terms of light, levity?

KB: We, we had our moments and stuff, you know, because of different personalities that were, you know, assigned out there. But at the same time, you know, everyone took their job seriously. I don't know, I guess the most, we had fun time coming, coming, the bus ride out was kind of, you know, that was really, really almost depressing.

SB: Uh-hum.

KB: But the bus ride in, coming back in, you know, you go, oh yeah, I'm gonna be in at least five or six days. And get to be with the family, and do things you had planned and stuff.

SB: You had something to look forward to.

KB: Yes. So, but I really can't think of anything, I guess I'm basically a dull person. [Laughter.] I can't think of anything that really stood out, or anything like that.

SB: That's all right. A couple of these questions I think you've already addressed, but did you ever get 'jacked up'?

KB: That's a term, somebody told you about being 'jacked up,' but that's a term I know, it came from the security police, because being 'jacked up' means that, you know, you've done something you shouldn't have done. And the police have you at bay, that's what it means. But, no, we never got 'jacked up,' no. [Laughter.]

SB: You 'jacked up'...

KB: We 'jacked up' other people, you know.

SB: And did you then, do you have experiences where you 'jacked up' other people?

KB: No, because as I said before we never had anybody, you know, on site, trying to get on site, or anything.

SB: Okay. I guess the rest of the questions really are going to be sort of assessment type questions. And the first one is, are there any positive or negative lessons that you would pass on to your successors? Ah, if there were still people out here, or at the other missile sites, any positives and any negatives?

KB: Well, you know, I would like to think, and they probably do this at places like Cheyenne, because all they have is missiles to, you know, put the missile people, especially security police, who work in the missiles fields, on the same level as those security policemen who work, you know, in the aircraft part. Because, again, as you said before, I felt like a second class citizen, you know. You're just with missiles, no big deal. But you know, the people in the Air Force are professional, and at least they were when I left. I don't how they are now, because I heard it's kind of relaxed right now, so I don't know.

SB: Do you have contact with active duty personnel?

KB: A few. You know, we don't discuss what they do now. I hear a lot of these young people saying that there's a lack of discipline now, in the Air Force. You know, it's just not there. The way it used to be, I'm sure there is some there, but I don't want to say that because I left that it went down. But I've heard even young people say I'm getting out because there is no discipline.

SB: And you didn't face a discipline problem when you were in?

KB: Of course we did, oh yeah, we had discipline, discipline problems. I had discipline problems myself. [Laughter.] I definitely wasn't an angel. All in all, though, I think I was a pretty good solder, air man.

SB: What would you say your greatest challenge was as an air man, as a security policeman?

KB: The greatest challenge was, was getting up, putting on the uniform and going and do the job the way it's supposed to be done, you know? That's… and to keep doing it day after day. That's the hardest part.

SB: Was it hard to get excited about your job?

KB: It was at times. It was, I mean that was, I mean it took a certain type of person to get up and do what we did. To go out there and ride up and down those gravel roads, searching for missile sites, that you thought was over here, it was five miles back the other way. You know, that type of thing. A lot of people don't realize what we went through. That missile field is, um, it builds something in a person. What it is I don't know.

SB: Did you ever take your boys out there?

KB: Never.

SB: Never? Would you take them to the national park once it's complete?

KB: I certainly would I'd be glad, I'd be glad. I wouldn't, wouldn't mind being a tour guide for that place, now. You know, I took, I had my son from South Carolina come here last summer, and I took him to the museum at Ellsworth. The partial, you know, the little pictures of the LCF, the missile field set up, and I was saying, "Wow, this is where we used to go." I was giving him a tour of the place.

SB: Uh-hmm.

KB: And it was really exciting, exciting for me.

SB: We climbed down Delta Nine and also went in Delta One to the Launch Control facility and to the LCC below, and that was an awe-inspiring event for me. I was a product of the, you know, Cold War Era, and grew up in South Dakota. And during the Cuban Missile Crisis, you know remember all these things. And driving to the Black Hills and, and seeing all these different silos and, you know, knowing what that meant. What do you consider your most significant accomplishment?

KB: The fact that, you know, we did what we were supposed to do. We never, no one ever got away with a missile. No one ever got away with one. So that's, no one ever got on site to damage one. So, I guess we did what we were supposed to do. So. And you know, I don't know if you can find anything great in that, but that was what we were supposed to do.

SB: I've got, I think, two more questions. Tim Pavek said that this might be a good question to ask somebody. Were there any stories of folklore, of ghosts, or unexplainable occurrences. And I know you talked about the one OZ going of continually, right? But were there any other sort of stories like that?

KB: I'm sure there were, and I'm trying, but I can't recall, you know, right now, what they were. So they must not have been that great of a story to begin with. [laughter]

SB: Okay. Do you have any other comments? Anything I should have asked you that I didn't? Or that you would like to address?

KB: Uh, no. But I'm sure once I leave this room, I will probably have a few.

SB: Well, maybe we'll have to do a second interview at some point.

KB: Well, you know, I'll tell what I'll do. If I come up with something, I'll write it down and I'll fax it to you.

SB: Thank you. That'd be great. That's it.

KB: Okay.

SB: That was relatively painless!

[End of interview]